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ABSTRACT

A learning module is a competency-based tool focused on what a learner will know or be able to do as a result of using the tool. Modules are especially suitable for outcome-based adult learning programs that emphasize self-direction and individual or small group approaches. Although learning modules vary greatly, six essential components are as follows: a statement of purpose, introduction to module use, learning outcomes, learning activities, learning resources, and evaluation procedures. For a module to be useful, congruence must be evident between learner needs and its content. Special attention should be directed to outcomes, activities, and evaluation procedures. Effective modules outline material clearly and attractively. Content is distributed logically and creatively; information is accessible. An outline of content should be completed prior to development of any written or audiovisual material. An arrangement for a typical, well-organized module is as follows: cover and back pages, title page, copyright page, statement of purpose, table of contents, foreword, learning session chapters, and appendixes. (YLB)

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TECHNIQUES: DEVELOPING LEARNING MODULES FOR ADULTS

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As a facilitator of adult learning, have you ever wondered where to turn when your or the available texts, materials, or resources don't fit the needs of the learners? You might solve the problem by creating a learning module.

What is a Learning Module?

A learning module is a competency-based tool focused on what a learner will know or be able to do as a result of using the tool. Module content highlights learning outcomes, activities designed to achieve the outcomes, and procedures for evaluating the achievement. Resources are provided or suggested that meet particular learner needs and directly relate to achievement of the stated outcomes.

Why Select a Learning Module?

Modules are especially suitable for outcome-based adult learning programs that emphasize self-direction and individual or small group approaches. In these programs, a learning module is the key resource for learners and facilitators alike. The module serves as a guide for the learner, a source of inspiration and information during the learning process. The module offers a framework for action for a facilitator; a means of helping learners help themselves during the learning process. In many programs a module helps users develop and demonstrate self-directed learning skills.

Facilitators should consider using learning modules:

- To improve the quality of learning and the competence of learners.
- To accommodate a variety of learning styles.
- To encourage self-direction, creativity, and the effective use of resources on the part of learners.

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Necessary Components

Although learning modules may vary greatly, well designed modules contain recognized components. Six essential components are:

1. **A Statement of Purpose** — a clear, concise description of what the module is designed to do.
2. **An Introduction to the Use of the Module** — Special instructions that help the learner use the module easily and that highlight any prerequisite skills.
3. **Learning Outcomes** — Statements of purpose designed by authors, facilitators or learners describing what learners will know or be able to do after using the module.
4. **Learning Activities** — Individual or group experiences designed to achieve the learning outcomes.
5. **Learning Resources** — People, places and things that assist the learning process.
6. **Evaluation Procedures** — Actions to determine the value or worth of a learning experience; the level of achievement of outcomes.

MAKING THE MODULE USEFUL

Congruence

Congruence must be evident between learner needs and the content of a module for the item to be useful. For example, the learner's need for quality learning and competence in a particular content area is directly related to the module's introduction, outcomes, activities, resources, and evaluation procedures. The learning styles, self-direction and creativity of a learner are directly affected by the module's purpose, activities, and resources. Special attention should be directed to outcomes, activities and evaluation procedures:

* **Learning Outcomes** — All learning outcomes are focused on learning rather than instruction or related activities. They may be cognitive (related to knowledge, understanding and "knowing"), affective (related to values, attitudes and "feeling"), or performance based (related to observable skills and "doing"). A balance of cognitive, affective, and performance outcomes is preferable but must be appropriate to the content area.

Learning outcome statements commonly highlight four components: a) the learner; b) the observable action or product; c) the conditions (if any) at assessment; and d) the minimum acceptable response.

Outcome statements suitable for individualized learning experiences with adults (in academic or nonacademic programs) often emphasize behavioral and content area components. Statements are then related to appropriate resources, strategies, evidence of accomplishment, criteria, and means of validating the learning.

* **Learning Activities** — Learning activities must provide opportunity for cognitive, affective, and performance functions which are matched to the desired learning outcome. For example, "thinking" experiences must be selected to insure cognitive learning outcomes; "doing" experiences to insure performance outcomes. Quality activities support self-direction and enable learners to use methods related to their learning styles and left/right brain hemispheric mode preferences.

* **Evaluation Procedures** — Modules should employ the most commonly used formal and informal approaches to self, peer, and facilitator evaluation. Formative and summative approaches with written, oral, and visual formats are especially helpful. Carefully constructed questions are essential.

Presentation

Quality learning modules outline material clearly and attractively. Designed for adult learners, the content of modules is distributed logically and creatively. Information is accessible. Narrative portions of modules are easily understood, and appropriate visuals support the flow of information. Activity time-frames are designated as required.

Because the actual content of a module is up to the designer and based on the particular needs of a program and the learners, structure and format varies. In determining the content of a module, it helps to answer these major questions:

1. What should the learner know and be able to do as the result of completing this module?
2. What activities and resources will help the learner know and do what is intended?
3. How should the activities be arranged to help the learner the most?
4. How will the learner demonstrate what is known or done?

An outline of content should be completed prior to the development of any written or audiovisual material.

When the content of a module has been determined, the sections completed and sequenced, page numbers may be assigned to the Table of Contents. Titles in the Table of Contents should relate to the areas of content presented (excluding reference to the title and copyright pages).

A typical, well-organized module might be arranged as follows:

- Cover and Back Pages
- Title Page
- Copyright Page
- Statement of Purpose
- Table of Contents
- Foreword
- Learning Session Chapters (Learning outcomes, Session Information, Learning Activities, Learning Resources, Evaluation Procedures, Timing and Assignments)
- Appendices

The learning modules can be an exciting learning experience for facilitators and authors. Use of learning modules encourages recognition of learning as an active process dependent upon the learner's effective use of appropriate resources.